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Palace Green Library excavations 2013 (PGL13)

History and topography of the site

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History and topography of the site

The area to the west of Palace Green behind the buildings that front onto the Green has received little scholarly attention. To understand the topography at the time of the mass burials it is necessary to reconstruct the topography and buildings of this area from the early-17th century onwards. This will also allow an assessment of the potential for other burials nearby. The relevant area bounded is that on the north by the castle, on the south by the Cathedral, on the east by Palace Green and on the west by the section of the Castle Walls known as Broken Walls (between the Castle and the Galilee Chapel of the Cathedral). Figure 1 shows this area in an extract from the first 1:500 plan of Durham City (Ordnance Survey 1857).

1. Structures north and south of the Palace Green Library

In the north of this area it is clear that the Castle Moat (or Castle Ditch), which is now the northern part of the Fellows' Garden of University College, was infilled in the later 17th century, as evidenced by excavations ahead of the construction of the Fellows' Garden Building (Lowther et al. 1993:entry 80). From 1438 the Bishop's Exchequer Building stood immediately south of the moat facing onto Palace Green (Hale et al. 2009). Adjacent to the south of the Exchequer is Cosin's Library, constructed in 1664, but it is not possible to say what preceded this building. The position of the medieval Castle Wall is also clear from the rear of the Fives Court to the buildings of the Castle itself, with the extant wall including evidence of Norman stonework (Jones 1921:392). The area from the Exchequer and Cosin's Library to the wall is shown as garden on all sufficiently detailed plans from Forster (1754) onwards (Figure 2) but is not clearly illustrated in earlier views and maps.

To the south of the area, the Cathedral graveyard was presumably in use in the medieval period. The original line of the Castle Wall on the west of the graveyard is debatable, and Jones (1921:391) suggested a SW-NE medieval alignment to the east of present western wall, but there is little evidence south of Windy Gap for any particular line. In the Commonwealth period, after the suppression of the Cathedral in 1645, the graveyard appears to have been leased out, and even in 1665 and 1671 there were animals grazing in it with some years to run of a lease (Ornsby 1872:120,137,290).

On the northern edge of the graveyard against Windy Gap stands the building now known as Divinity House. This was erected by Bishop Cosin in 1661 to replace Bishop Langley's Grammar School which had stood on the eastern side of Palace Green. This supposedly had been destroyed by the Scots army in 1640, though recent work suggests Cosin restored an existing building and thus any destruction was not total (Hale et al. 2009). Cosin's school was built in what appears to have been the north-west corner of the Cathedral graveyard but there is no evidence as to whether or not it was preceded by another building in this location. At least three finds of skeletal remains have been made adjoining this building (see below).

Immediately north of Windy Gap facing onto Palace Green is the 1820s Registry Building which replaced a County Court on the same site built by Cosin in 1664 (Hale et al. 2009). The current building probably has a very similar footprint to Cosin's Court House as evidenced by Forster's (1754) map and its view of Palace Green¹ showing the same length of frontage. Cosin's Court House replaced a 1588 County Court House which had been badly damaged or destroyed by the Scots Army in 1640 (Hale et al. 2009; Humble 2013). Whether Cosin's building shared the footprint

¹ <http://valentine.dur.ac.uk/pip/fullrecord.asp?ref1=728>

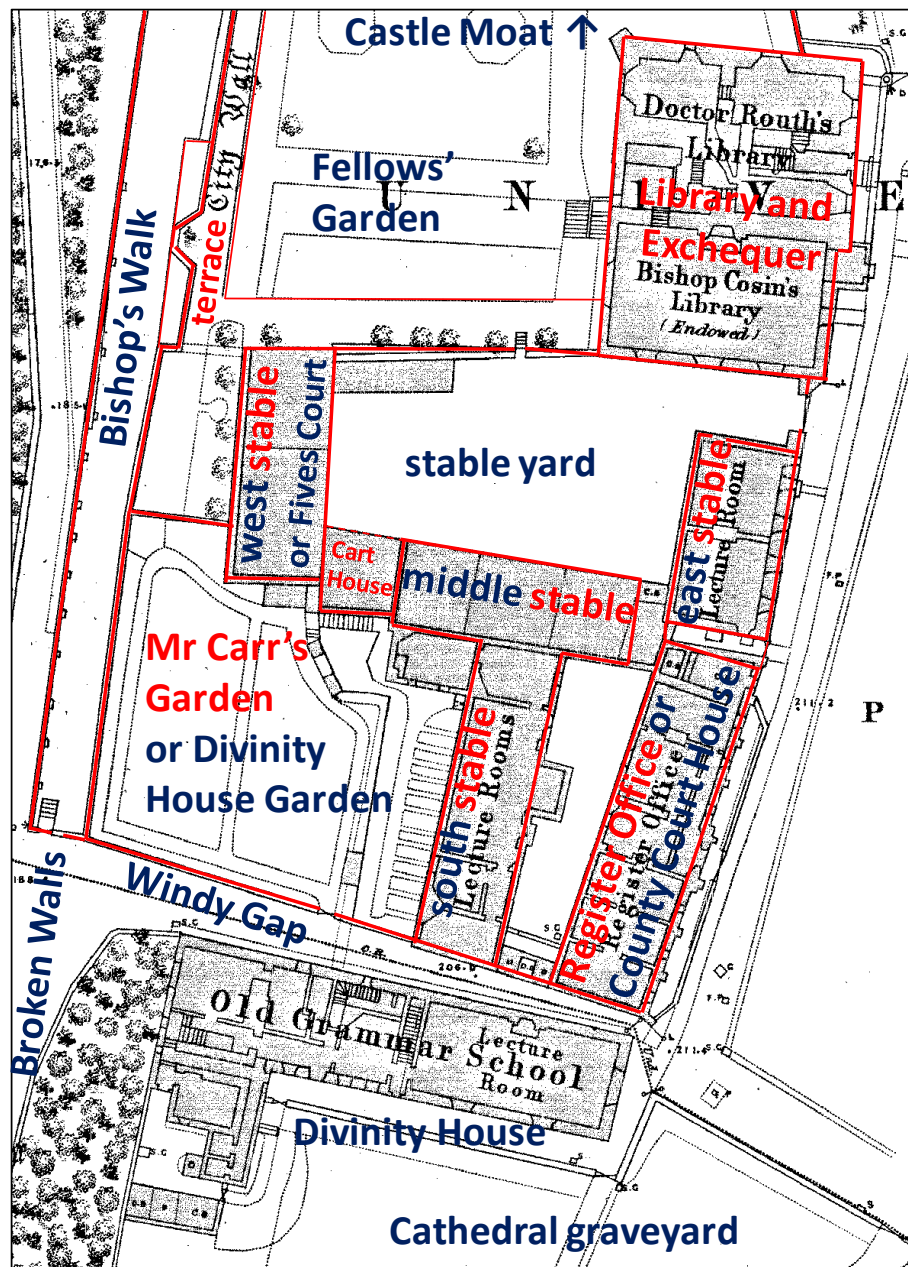


Figure 1: Extract from 1:500 Ordnance Survey Plan of Durham City 1857 (© Crown Copyright and Database Right 2015. Ordnance Survey Digimap Licence) overlaid in red with walls and labels from a c.1833 plan (Anonymous c.1833), and in blue with other names used in the text.

of the late 16th century building is unknown. Hutchison (1823:348) states that prior to the construction of Cosin's Court House, "the adjoining building was used for the law courts, under which are stables; the upper chamber is a mean and melancholy place for so important a purpose:" However he also states that in 1649 an order was made "for the necessary repairs of the sessions-house". Although it is not entirely clear whether these repairs were to the 1588 building or the adjoining one, it seems likely that in the 1640s and 1650s the Court House site was derelict, but the adjoining two-storey block with stables underneath was not. The latter could have been on the site of the later eastern stable block or of Cosin's Library.

The structures described above frame the central part of the area west of Palace Green (including the excavation site) which is less well documented and less studied. The detailed and precisely

surveyed 1857 town plan forms a starting point from which the earlier topography can be reconstructed by regression. The 1857 plan demonstrates that the buildings shown on a plan of 1833 (Anonymous c.1833) all continued to exist (Figure 1) but the stable buildings had been converted for University uses with some minor additions. The layout of the southern end of the Fellows' Garden in 1833 was the same as in 1857 and similar to the present. Forster's (1754) map (Figure 2) shows a series of buildings with a similar series of dog-legs in their outline, but with the western one abutting the Castle Wall. However, the shape of the block representing the Exchequer and Cosin's Library is clearly not right and so Forster's outlines must be considered schematic rather than surveyed.

2. The Stable Yard

The eastern stable block and the area west of it that was a stable yard in 1754 and 1833 are now under the main buildings of the Palace Green Library. The southern stable yard behind the Registry is still partly an open courtyard. Archaeological observations in these areas were made during excavation of service trenches for refurbishment works in 2011 (Figure 3; Platell 2011). In the southern stable yard excavations were less than 1m deep and the foundations of the Registry were the only items of archaeological interest revealed. In the area of what is now the Dunelm Gallery, the trenches were similarly shallow, but revealed that the concrete floor lay immediately above a cobbled surface which abutted fragments of a wall. Both cobbles and wall were later than a made-ground deposit broadly dated as post-medieval from the single pipe-stem found within it. Platell (2011) suggested that this wall was part of the lecture rooms fronting on to Palace Green in the 1857 plan, but the location appears to be too far west for this (Platell 2011:Fig. 4). These walls must therefore represent a later 19th century building behind the eastern stable block demolished to make way for the lecture rooms constructed in the 1890s.

3. The Stable Blocks

During the construction of the Pace Building, in an excavation in the Fellow's Garden, Dr Ian Doyle observed and photographed part of the foundations of the western wall of the Fives Court, originally the western stable block (Figure 3, no.4; Doyle 1965). His photograph is labelled as showing the edge of Broken Walls Quarry, and also shows a brick relieving arch in the stone foundations. This arch is now visible above ground level (Figure 4), and the size and shape of the bricks suggest a late 17th or early 18th century date. The southern end of the block is shown in a

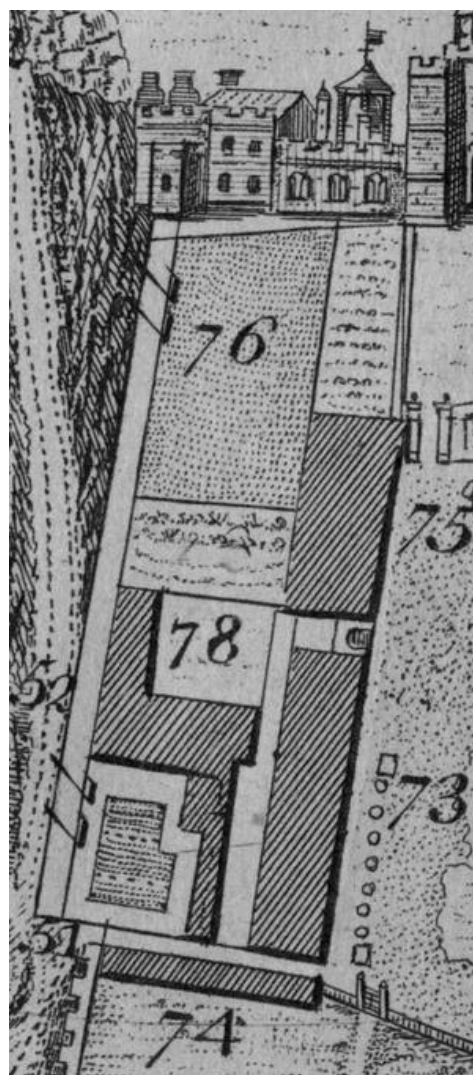


Figure 2: Extract from Forster's Plan of the City of Durham (1754). © Durham University. Key: 51 Lane from the Green to the Broken Walls; 52 Road down the Broken Walls to the Bridge; 73 The County House; 74 The Grammar School; 75 The Exchequer & Bishop's Library; 76 The Castle Bowling Green; 77 A Walk; 78 A Yard before the Castle Stables.

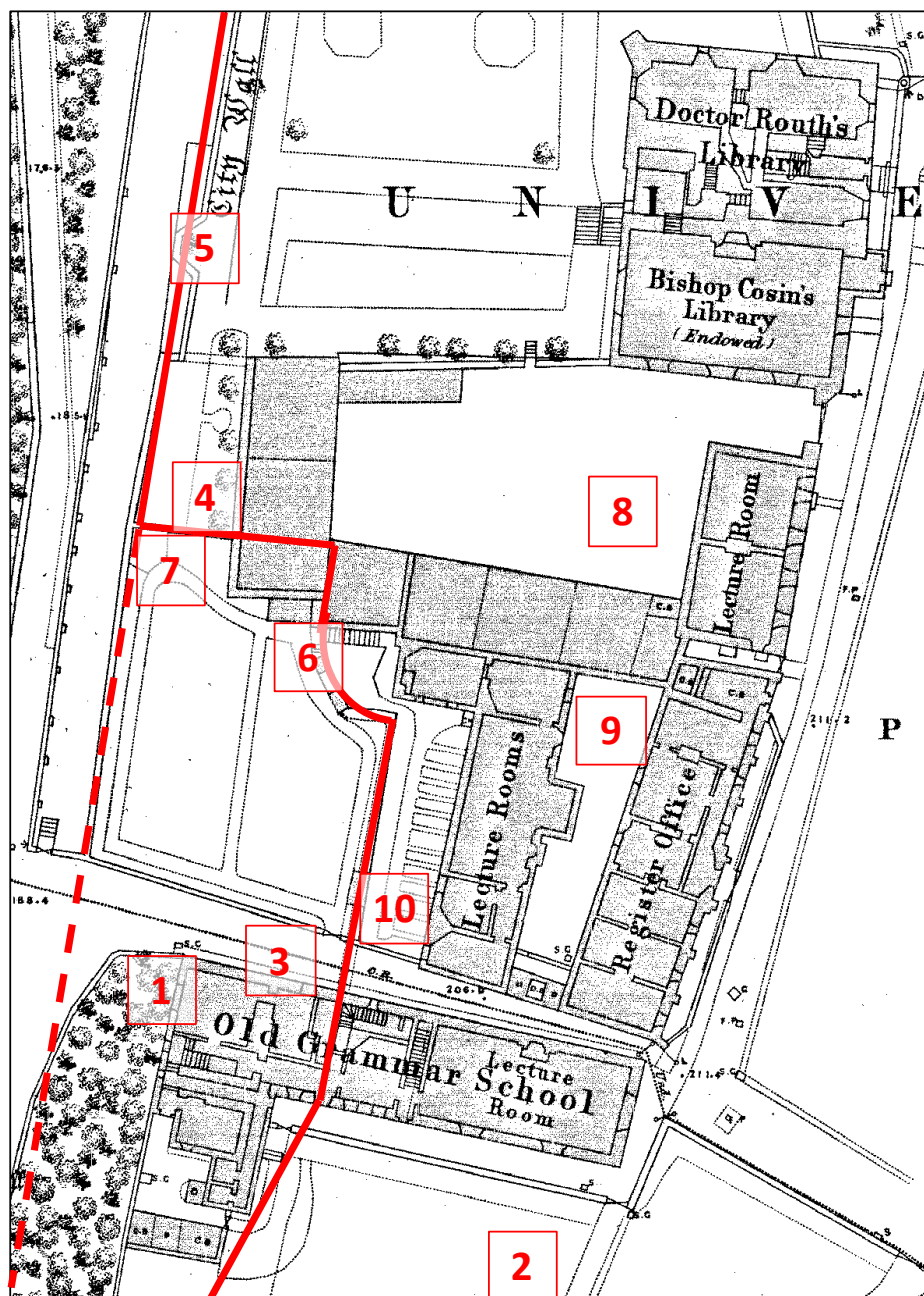


Figure 3: Extract from 1:500 Ordnance Survey Plan of Durham City 1857 (© Crown Copyright and Database Right 2015. Ordnance Survey Digimap Licence) overlaid with locations of archaeological features and finds. Red line: Jones (1921) preferred line for the city wall; dotted line Jones less preferred option. Key to archaeological finds: 1 Skull reported by Jones (1921); 2 1946 discovery of burials (approx.); 3 2001 watching brief skeleton; 4 Doyle's 1965 observations of Fives Court foundations; 5 Site of Cosin's belvedere; 6 ULX65 observations of 'bastion' and adjacent buildings; 7 ULX65 photograph of Castle Wall; 8 2011 ASDU excavations in Dunelm Gallery; 9 2011 ASDU excavations in courtyard; 10 PGL13 mass burials

photograph from archaeological salvage work ahead of the construction of the Pace Building (site code ULX65) as being constructed of brick over a very deep stone foundation which formed part of the northern wall of Divinity House Garden (Figure 3 no.6; Parsons 1965).



Figure 4: Brick relieving arch at the rear of the western stable block of likely late 17th or early 18th century date.

The western stable block is shown in a view of the Castle from the south-west² dated 1774 (Grose 1774), its rear set away from the Castle Wall, with the back of the Exchequer and Cosin's Library beyond to the north and the western gable of the middle stable block beyond to the south. The absence of the western stable from Wood's (1820) plan would appear to be an omission rather than evidence of demolition (contra Humble 2013) as the surviving fabric shows no sign of a rebuilding. The extant western stable block would therefore appear to date from sometime between 1660 and 1754.

The eastern stable block was demolished in the 1890s and replaced with lecture rooms that now form the main exhibition spaces at Palace Green Library. Hutchinson (1785:358) implies that there was a two-storey building on the site of the eastern stable block or Cosin's Library by 1649 and until at least 1664, but its precise location is not known. A building still occupies the footprint of the middle stable block, but is currently entirely surrounded by other buildings and its fabric cannot be examined easily. ULX65 archive photographs (Parsons 1965) show that the cart house had been rebuilt in brick, sharing a continuous slate roof with the building on the site of the middle stable. The 19th and 20th century brick-wall overlay older stone foundations and the visible corner of the stable block also appears to be of stone and not precisely aligned with the brickwork. The late date of the roof is confirmed internally by the style of the exposed beams in the current Durham University Gallery. For both the eastern and middle stable blocks, the date of construction can only be stated to be prior to 1754.

The southern stable block still stands with a hand-made brick superstructure over stone foundations; the 2013 excavations showed that these overlie the mass burials. The brick superstructure must post-date 1660 and a building with a very similar footprint was present by

² <http://valentine.dur.ac.uk/pip/fullrecord.asp?ref1=721>



Figure 5: View of the wall along Windy Gap across the south end of the south stable.

1754. The roof is of stone slates and internally the exposed beams are large, consistent with the dating of the walls. However the south wall of the building facing onto Windy Gap is later than the west wall and the brickwork is continuous along Windy Gap from the rear of the Registry Building to the gateway beside the Pace Building (Figure 5). The foundations are of stone only from the east corner of the stable block westward, but appear to be continuous. It is possible that this wall was rebuilt in 1820 when the Registry was built, but partly on earlier foundations.

4. Divinity House garden

Both the 1857 plan (Figure 1) and Forster in 1754 (Figure 2) show a garden abutting the north-western part of Windy Gap, between the Bishop's Walk and the back of the southern stable block. This is also shown in outline on the 1833 plan where it is labelled 'Mr Carr's Garden' (Figure 1) but with no internal detail shown, though the dimensions are given. John Carr was headmaster of the Grammar School for over 20 years until his death in October 1833 (Anonymous 1834:423; Malden 2013:46). Jones (1921:392) described this piece of land as 'Divinity House Garden'. There is therefore a long association of the plot with Divinity House and its occupants, but when this started is unknown.

To the west of the garden is the southern end of Bishop's Walk constructed by Cosin at an unknown date during his 1660-1672 episcopacy (Roberts 2010). The Walk must predate the extant Castle Wall, but today (Figure 6) and in a photograph from the ULX65 archive (Figure 3 no. 7; Parsons 1965), the Wall clearly follows the change in ground level from the Fellows' Garden to the Divinity House Garden. As Doyle's (1965) photograph shows that this change in level is due to quarrying, the Castle Wall at this point post-dates the use of this quarry. Jones (1921:392) considered the western wall of the Divinity House Garden to be 'comparatively modern', i.e. post-medieval.



Figure 6: View of the Castle Wall beside the Pace Building, with the wall of the Bishops' Walk in the foreground and showing how the Castle wall follows the change in ground level within the wall.

The 1857 plan shows a dividing wall between the area that has recently become the café and the plot where the Pace Building was erected in the 1960s. Observations recorded at the time of the Pace Building construction showed that the ground level to the west of this retaining wall was 2m lower than to the east (Lowther et al. 1993:entry 50). The finds recovered in the lower area were almost entirely late 17th to early 18th century in date and indicated a midden deposit (Lowther et al. 1993:entry 50).

The 1857 plan and one of Pace's drawings (Parsons 1965) show the upper part of Divinity House Garden adjacent to the southern stable consisted of a series of garden beds, and this remained unpaved until the recent construction of the café. These plans also show a quarter-octagonal structure in the north-east of the garden, abutting the Cart House of the 1833 plan. Spot heights on Pace's drawing show this was about 3m above the lower level. This feature does not appear on the 1833 plan, probably due to the lack of internal detail, nor on Forster's 1754 map, probably because of its schematic nature and smaller scale. However, the retaining wall and octagonal feature were significant enough that Jones (1921:392) proposed that they represent the original line of the Castle Wall and the remains of a half-octagonal bastion (Figure 3). In Patteson's (1595) map of Durham (reproduced in Humble 2013:52), and in Speed's (1611) similar view of the city³, there are three round or octagonal defensive towers shown south of the Exchequer and possibly facing onto Palace Green. These are similar in form to the representation of the Great Hall of the Castle and the Galilee Chapel so cannot be taken as realistic in form, but can be interpreted as a large, possibly defensive, structure which might well be the bastion proposed by Jones. However a contrary view was taken by the authors of the City of Durham Archaeological Survey:

³ <http://valentine.dur.ac.uk/pip/fullrecord.asp?ref1=1367>

“An insubstantial angled stone structure in the NW corner of the site was thought to be the base of a tower on the line of the City Wall; it is perhaps more likely to be part of an earlier building which had been truncated and buttressed to support the standing buildings. The City wall as such was not observed within the site, although it may lie beneath the terrace on which the buildings fronting Palace Green sit.” (Lowther et al. 1993:entry 50)

The only known photographs of this structure are in the ULX65 archive, and show substantial low buttresses. The stonework is not massive as might be expected on the lower part of the medieval Castle Wall. However, the structure is not well-positioned to support the stable blocks as it is separated from the southern block by the raised area of the garden and it is not arranged around the corner of the middle block but on its southern edge. It therefore does appear to be the remains of a structure but perhaps not the medieval Castle Wall.

Another octagonal structure which should not be confused with the possible bastion was a belvedere erected by Cosin on the city wall and aligned on his new library. This had views of the river but especially of the newly created Bishop’s Walk (Roberts 2010). The octagonal belvedere can be seen in two similar views of the castle executed in the late 17th or early 18th century (Leyland 1994:208-212, Plates 93 & 94). Leyland showed that these views are not accurate in details and lack perspective, but the position of the belvedere is clearly on the wall alongside the Bishop’s Walk, and not at the location Jones proposed for the bastion. A deviation in the wall on the 1857 plan is the likely location of this structure (Figure 3 no. 5; Roberts 2010). The stable blocks cannot be seen in those two views, but given the elements of the castle missing and the omission of the Grammar School in one of them, no weight can be placed on this.

It appears therefore that the most coherent reconstruction is to accept the line of the Castle Wall proposed by Jones (1921:392), but reject his identification of a bastion and tentatively identify the octagonal structure as the base of a structure that existed in the late 16th and early 17th century. The low level of the Divinity House Garden should be regarded as a consequence of quarrying outside of the walls, with the northern edge of the quarry lying under the western and middle stable blocks, possibly close to the boundary between Divinity House Garden and the Fellows’ Garden. The date of the quarrying cannot be easily established; the Broken Walls Quarry was in use up until the 1660s but may have extended some distance along the banks between the Castle and Cathedral (Ornsby 1872:359; Roberts 2010:176).

Taken together, the dating of the Bishop’s Walk, the late nature of the extant Castle Wall and the date of the garden deposits suggest that the Divinity House Garden was laid out after the restoration, and that the lower part probably lay outside the Castle Walls until that time.

The mass-burial site

The earliest feature revealed by the 2013 excavations (see excavation report) was an organic deposit (context 520) in containing a hazelnut shell radiocarbon dated (see report on *Chronology of the burials*) to AD 1190-1280 (95% probability) overlain by a stone surface (519) at a depth of 2.7m below the courtyard surface, which in turn was overlain by a deposit (508) 0.5m thick containing waterlogged timbers radiocarbon dated to AD 1160-1270 (95% probability). Pace’s plan of the site prior to construction (Parsons 1965), shows that the courtyard was about 7.8 feet (2.4m) above the lower garden. The waterlogged deposits are therefore above the level of the lower garden and drainage must be impeded by unobserved materials to the west which have been present since at least the early 13th century. Hugh Pudsey, Bishop of Durham 1153-1195, undertook extensive building works, including building the Galilee Chapel (Barrow 2004) which

may have necessitated re-aligning the Castle Walls (Jones 1921:391), a process with which these deposits might perhaps be associated.

In conclusion, the site where mass burials were discovered in 2013 was located towards the southern limits of the property previously controlled by the Bishop. Who owned or controlled it between 1646 and 1660 is unclear. The burials occurred behind the County Court House which was probably derelict from 1640 and close to the Castle Wall above the Broken Walls Quarry. To the north, there may have been an earlier bastion or other defensive structure surviving, and facing onto the Green a building, on the site of the eastern stable block or the site of Cosin's Library, which from 1640 temporarily substituted for the Court House. There is no evidence about the presence or absence of other buildings in the immediate vicinity.

5. Could there be more mass burials awaiting discovery?

If the 2013 mass burials are those of Scottish prisoners from 1650, then it should be expected that there are many more burials somewhere nearby. The incomplete excavation of two pits has revealed 29 individuals but Cole (1991) estimated that about 1700 prisoners from the Battle of Dunbar died and were buried in Durham.

Burials have been observed around Divinity House on at least three occasions (Figure 3 nos. 1-3). Jones (1921) reports that when the bay window was added "a skull was unearthed possessing a deep gash in the right-hand upper side, as if struck by a sword or an axe. The skull is now in the [Durham] School Museum". If this was the 19th century bay window on the west end of Divinity House then (*contra* Jones) it is evidence that burials were close to this place and therefore that the Castle Wall ran due north from the Galilee Chapel rather than north-eastwards.

A second observation of burials was made south of Divinity House. "When"the central heating system was installed in The Music School in 1946, the trench for pipes cut into a mass grave on the north side of the Cathedral and went in a line from the North door under the line of trees and possibly under the Music School. The bodies had been buried without coffins and had been tossed in on top of one another" (Cole 1991). Cole (1991) implicitly, and (Wilson 2008) explicitly, identify these skeletons as the Scottish prisoners. However, without further detail of the disposition of the bones, the description given could also apply to a deposit of charnel. If Divinity House was constructed on the graveyard, it would be expected that ordinary burials would have been disturbed in 1661 and placed in a charnel pit as disarticulated remains, as was common practice. Without more detail of the precise location and disposition of the bones it is difficult to decide between the hypotheses of Scottish prisoners and a charnel deposit.

A third find was made in 2001 on the north side of Divinity House, during the excavation of a water-pipe trench in Windy Gap (Inkster 2001). This was a disturbed burial, oriented west-east towards the west end of Divinity House. It was excavated and recorded as part of a watching brief. As it is no longer in the site archive (Alex Croom pers. comm.), it is presumed to have been disposed of by cremation without further study, as was intended at the time of the report. The orientation suggests that this is likely to have been a medieval burial disturbed during the construction of Divinity House.

We know from the 2013 excavations that the two mass burials extend north, south and east of the excavated area, under existing buildings and walls. While it is possible that there were also mass burials in the Cathedral graveyard (including the site of Divinity House) before it was leased out as pasture, these are likely to have been disturbed by a further two centuries of use of the burial

ground, especially as the depth of graves increased in the 19th century. Given the history and topography, it seems almost impossible that there could have been more burials in the lower part of Divinity House Garden, and none were reported during the construction of the Pace Building, nor is there any human bone in the site archive. Neither can there be burials under the southern end of the western stable block or the southern edge of the middle stable block as these were built out on deep foundations over the edge of the Broken Walls Quarry. It is quite possible, however, that additional burial pits lie under the southern stable block (currently the Library's Learning Centre and part of the Music Department), the café, the northern parts of the middle and western stable blocks, and the whole area northwards from there as far as the former moat, but excluding the Exchequer Building. All these areas could have been open ground in early to mid-seventeenth century and available to be requisitioned for burials.

6. Acknowledgements

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